



## **Annual Report 2001/2002**

The Victoria Cool Aid Society  
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United Way  
Member Agency



The Victoria Cool Aid Society has come a long way in its 34-year existence. The organization began in 1968 as the Cool Aid Hostel, which was established to provide short-term shelter to transient youth and adults, and has grown into a multi-faceted organization that operates a diverse range of social and health services. Cool Aid has a clear and demonstrated history of success and commitment to the community, focussing on those street-involved and homeless people who are most at risk in our society.

From a simple hostel 34 years ago, Cool Aid has grown into a society with a budget of \$8 million, over 150 employees and ten programs offering services ranging from emergency shelters to health services, and from employment assistance to outreach services. It is clear that citizens of the Capital Region have come to trust and rely on Cool Aid to develop and offer critical services, often where there is no other option.

Recently, the agency has gone through a period of rapid growth, with the addition of a number of programs of varying sizes, services and focuses. Cool Aid now faces an era of consolidation in order for it to be able to preserve and enhance its integrity as an agency and to maintain its ability to deliver programs and services. Through the provision of these accessible and affordable services Cool Aid has been able to meet individual needs and make a positive contribution toward creating a healthy and vibrant community. The Society looks forward to continuing its service to the community for many years to come.

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The past year has been a challenging one for Cool Aid – one of unprecedented growth and expansion, and one that has required us to reconsider and redefine our mandate. In order to maintain the high quality of programs and services that we offer to our client base, last year Cool Aid entered into a comprehensive review process that started with an internal organizational review and the retention of outside resources to assist with our program definition.

As last year came to a close, this organizational review was expanded to include a core review of all programs and services. It was clear to us at Cool Aid that while we were addressing some client needs well, others were a challenge. In particular, Cool Aid has experienced what some have called a “mandate creep,” with a resulting expansion into programs that may not be directly within our scope.

Cool Aid has now been able to reconfirm our mandate: to provide shelter, housing and health services to those who are most disadvantaged in our community. Over the next few months we will be reviewing all programs to ensure that our mandate is being met as best as it possibly can be. The next year will likely be just as challenging as the last one, as we move to ensure that our programs continue to serve those in our community who are most in need.

We remain committed to the long-term success of Cool Aid, and we are clearly prepared to make the changes that are appropriate and necessary. Throughout this process, we look forward to strengthening our relationships with our community partners, which have been so important to the success of our organization.

Finally, I want to extend my sincere thanks to all staff, Board members, funders and partners for your ongoing support during this time of transition and redefinition. Your aid and assistance has been sincerely appreciated, and we look forward to your continued backing over the next year of adjustment and consolidation.

*Tom Moore  
Chair  
Board of Directors*

*September 2002*

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

It is my pleasure to have come to Cool Aid during a period of fundamental redefinition and redesign, and to play a role in ensuring the long-term stability of this important and respected agency. The past year led to a necessary review of the appropriateness of a number of Cool Aid programs, and I look forward to implementing changes which will refocus our agency on the clients who are most in need.

Last year, Cool Aid reiterated its focus on shelter, housing and health needs for those in our community who are most disadvantaged. Over the next year, we will implement the changes that are necessary to provide stable services to meet this mandate, which will potentially entail changes for all our existing programs. Throughout this process we will review the appropriateness of our services with funders, as we move to ensure that resources are effectively used to meet the needs of our clients.

Despite a number of management difficulties that came to light last year, coupled with the pressures of chronic under-funding, Cool Aid continues to deliver high quality programs and services to people who live in vulnerable circumstances. As the Victoria Cool Aid Society enters its 35th year of existence, I am confident that the actions taken over the past year will ensure the continuance and consolidation of our programs and services. We move forward into the next phase of our organizational redesign with a great deal of optimism and a renewed commitment to serving our clients' needs.

*Carol Finnie  
Executive Director  
Victoria Cool Aid Society*

*September 2002*

## **SHELTER PROGRAMMING**

### **STREETLINK EMERGENCY SHELTER**

Since it opened in 1968, the Streetlink Emergency Shelter has gradually expanded and diversified its services in order to meet its clients' constantly changing needs. In addition to offering overnight accommodation and meals, Streetlink provides referrals, hygiene and mental health services, housing advocacy, community liaison, and crisis and life skills counselling.

Streetlink is the oldest Cool Aid program, and it continues to be one of the busiest. Over the past year, occupancy rates were between 90% and 95%, in addition to an average of 20 people per day on the waitlist for a bed. Over 17,000 meals were served to individuals not staying at the shelter and 17,000 dinners were served to shelter residents in 2001. During the day, Streetlink has a minimum of 500 client interventions per month, through which referrals, advocacy, crisis intervention and support are provided to clients.

Last year, Streetlink was impacted by changes to the welfare system:

- There is now a 3-week waiting period for new clients to get on income assistance. As a result, there are greater numbers of people with no other options but emergency shelter, although bed spaces have not increased.
- The amount of time that people can be on welfare before they are required to do a job search or are removed from income assistance has been limited. As a result, it is likely that more Streetlink clients will be denied income assistance.
- An Employment Assistance Worker is working with Streetlink staff, both on a daily basis and on a monthly basis at case conferences, to assist staff in advocating for clients.

There were a number of staff and program development changes in the last year. With respect to staff, Streetlink is developing a development/training plan, which includes an intensive mental health course offered by the Vancouver Island Health Authority, First Aid (WCB), and diffusing. Training proposed for the next 6 months consists of verbal judo, brief solution-focused counselling, and concurrent disorders.

With respect to program development, Streetlink staff and managers have been working to implement the Integrated Community Mental Health Information System (ICMHIS) project, which will allow for increased communication between organizations with the intention of sharing information when appropriate. In addition, a new Intake Assessment system is being developed with the focus on case management, which will allow Streetlink to change from a "hostel mentality" towards a more complete "social services mentality".

## **KIWANIS EMERGENCY YOUTH SHELTER**

Since 1987, young people in Victoria who are unable to stay in the family home have had a safe, secure alternative to the uncertainty of the street: the Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter (KEYS), a 10-bed, short-term shelter for youth aged 13 to 18. To assist teenagers at risk, KEYS also provides crisis counselling, family sessions and consultation with parents and professionals.

Annually, KEYS serves 850 youth, through 7 full time and 12 relief staff. Clients come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and staff indicates that most youth entering KEYS will return to their community within the region and not to the streets of Victoria or go into the care of Ministry of Children and Family Development.

KEYS arose out of a concept that was generated by the needs identified in Streetlink and has been built on the community's capacity to care for their youth in crisis. It is somewhat different from other Cool Aid programs in that it only serves youth, and is not clearly part of the downtown community or culture. A key goal is early intervention, so that youth do not become chronic users of Cool Aid services (only about 15% of KEYS clients are repeats).

Cool Aid takes pride in knowing that the Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter has touched the lives of more than 6,000 youth and their families. Cool Aid also acknowledges the unwavering support of the Kiwanis Club of Victoria. We are sincerely grateful for the contribution of the facility and the thousands of hours of volunteer time to maintain a building where youth feel safe to stay. Their continued support for Cool Aid is very appreciated.

As with other Cool Aid programs, KEYS looks forward to the next year of change with hope for renewed and re-invigorated services to youth in our community.

## **SANDY MERRIMAN HOUSE**

Sandy Merriman House (SMH) was established in 1995. It is a fifteen-bed shelter and drop in for women only, and came as a result of an initiative called the Downtown Women's Project. The Project emerged in early 1994 as a community development initiative and involved low income and homeless women in addressing the emergency shelter needs for homeless women in Victoria. In 1998 Cool Aid added SMH to its group of programs.

Through its shelter and drop-in, SMH provides meals, hygiene products, shower and laundry facilities and other services such as crisis intervention, one-to-one support, discussion groups and workshops on lifeskill development and weekly visits by the community nurse. Many of the women that access SMH have drug and alcohol related issues and some are dealing with serious and persistent mental illness. SMH staff work closely with them and make referrals to housing, mental health and drug and alcohol agencies. This year 481 women spent an average of nine days each at the shelter, and the average monthly occupancy rate was 77 per cent.

Although the last year at SMH has been turbulent, programming was not only maintained, but also enhanced. Although SMH continues to serve primarily street-entrenched women, the numbers of those clients with multiple barriers increased last year, resulting in the implementation of a number of regularly scheduled workshops including Family Violence Project, Victoria AIDS Respite Care Society (VARCS), Aids Vancouver Island, and Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society (PEERS).

Volunteers continue to enhance SMH services, including 3 community volunteers who make dinners and one who provides REIKE therapy. Three client volunteers assist staff with lunch 2-3 times per week and 1 volunteer takes care of the garden, which is funded in part by the Peers Helping Peers Program administered through the Open Door.

Over the next year, SMH, through BC Housing, will be undergoing some building improvements. These include interior and exterior painting, plumbing upgrade, flooring repairs and upgrading, a new front door and the building of a gazebo to provide clients with a dry smoking space in the upcoming fall and winter months. To enhance safety, all locks have been removed from bathroom doors and stand-up showers will replace the bathtubs.

The Shelter manager will be implementing staff development including an evaluation of current Support Workers to ensure core competencies and shelter standards are met and implementing a course of appropriate training.

Finally, in partnership with Vancouver Island Health Authority, SMH will be networked through the Integrated Community Mental Health Information System (ICMHIS) software development program with other service agencies to provide an integrated model of service delivery.

# HOUSING PROGRAMMING

## HOUSING PROGRAMS

Cool Aid's Housing Program opened in February 1991 in response to the growing numbers of homeless people in our community, and was the first program in Canada that provided a housing model with a supportive element. Since then many housing societies in Canada have duplicated this type of housing in their communities. By focusing on building a sense of community, tenants and staff collaborate to build a supportive living situation and environment that enable tenants to experience personal growth and stability. Cool Aid's housing program is a community leader in developing appropriate options for the Homeless and those individuals at risk in our community.

Swift House: Swift House was the first building opened in February 1991. Swift House is a valuable resource for the homeless and homeless at risk people in Victoria and continues to provide housing to the most vulnerable members of our community. Some tenants use the housing program to help with stabilizing their lives and then move on, and others require a long term housing solution. Over the past year Swift House has added upgrades thanks to B.C. Housing and Adult Psychiatric Forensic Services, including a security camera and a viewing window at the main entrance to Swift House. Both of these items have made a tremendous difference in the level of peace and security for tenants, as they are often pressured by people who are sleeping on the street to use their apartments for shelter.

Pandora Project: Pandora was the second housing project opened by Cool Aid, and serves the same client base as Swift House. Residents of Pandora have had the advantage of having the Downtown Community Centre as their neighbour and are very appreciative of this great resource. With the help of the City of Victoria, Pandora residents added a beautiful Gazebo in the courtyard, which not only looks great but is also a functional outdoor shelter space for people who use it for a wide range of activities. Our music program continues to flourish at Pandora.

Johnson Manor: Johnson Manor is the most recent addition to the housing program, and was designed for people who have the most difficulty in finding and keeping safe, affordable housing. Johnson Manor opened December 1, 2001 and has been described as a cost-effective housing model for this particular client group. So far, the program has had a very high level of success because not only do the tenants of Johnson Manor enjoy living there, but the model also works well for case managers and housing staff. Johnson Manor is staffed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, which has proved to be a very productive way of caring for and supporting tenants. Johnson Manor is an attractive addition to the neighbourhood, and all of the stakeholders involved in this project should be very pleased by its success.

## **MIKE GIDORA PLACE**

September 2002 marks the second anniversary of the opening of Mike Gidora Place, Cool Aid's mixed market residential and commercial building at 749 Pandora. This year was probably best characterized as a "settling-in" year after the initial flurry of activity during the opening year, as tenants moved in and management sorted out many of the minor issues that arise in any newly constructed building. Now that Cool Aid and its tenants have been in the building for a while, a better understanding of the building, its downtown environment, and its operation has developed which will inform its continued development to best suit the needs of all the user groups.

### **Residential:**

The small suites continue to be very popular and functional. Tenants have expressed their appreciation for the design and downtown location time and time again. The most notable feature that appears to really make the design work for day to day living is the loft and high ceiling. The storage loft, while not intended for sleeping, has been put to many creative uses by tenants adapting to relatively small living spaces and highlights the well thought-out design that characterizes the building. That and the growing sense of community that has developed in the building have kept the turnover fairly low at 25% over the past year. 12 of the original tenants still live in the building.

### **Downtown Location:**

Having Cool Aid Administration and Cool Aid Employment Services (CAES) located downtown along with residential apartments is seen as a necessity for client access as well as an important encouragement to a healthy and vital urban core. However it does come with some unique challenges such as building security, grounds maintenance and inevitably, parking. The pressures on the street population are greater than ever, and the downtown area is populated 24 hours a day. There has been a notable increase in the incidents of people attempting to access the building at night to find an off-the-street place to sleep or conduct other business. Concurrently, an increase in the maintenance requirements of the entrance walkway has led to the consideration of a live-in caretaker for the building to provide overnight supervision. At the same time it should be noted that the tenants have developed a strong sense of community and taken real ownership of their building and neighbourhood which has had a beneficial effect on the whole block, particularly during the evening and at night.

The building continues to be a valuable addition to the downtown mix and a much appreciated option for the residential market.

## **HEALTH SERVICES PROGRAMMING**

### **COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE**

Established in 1970 as a small clinic providing free medical care to people who did not have coverage, the facility gradually grew as demand increased and the patients' illnesses became more serious. The Cool Aid Community Health Centre (CHC) has continued to strengthen its interdisciplinary health team over the past year, and to develop new initiatives related to integrated, comprehensive inner city primary health care.

CHC's newest program is a full service dental clinic, staffed by a dental hygienist and dentist, with the mandate to serve Victoria's inner city population and those unable to afford dental services. The dental clinic offers much needed readily accessed dental care for this population, something, which was previously unavailable. It has long been evident to CHC staff that the high burden of serious dental problems borne by CHC's clients create substantial adverse health consequences, including chronic infection and pain, poor nutrition and worsening of chronic illness. As such the presence of the dental clinic will close a large gap in health services and contribute greatly to client health improvement.

A major CHC commitment is enhanced community presence through physician and nurse practitioner outreach clinics at numerous agencies in downtown Victoria, including the Open Door, Sandy Merriman House, Streetlink Emergency Shelter, Native Friendship Centre and mental health residential care facilities. In addition, CHC staff provide regular case management support to a broad range of community agencies, outreach workers and Vancouver Island Health Authority resources.

CHC continues to fulfill its mandate to provide health care to those without access to needed services. Between 20-40% of clients seen at CHC lack required medical coverage to access services elsewhere. With onsite blood-work services and laboratory support from the health authority, patients without coverage can have needed testing done. Additionally, 12-20% of the prescriptions filled by CHC's pharmacy are for clients without coverage, who would otherwise be forced to go without required treatment.

Improved and better-integrated services at CHC have been strengthened by the implementation of an electronic medical record system. All CHC care providers and consultants are able to view and record client information in a shared file, which includes electronic lab and medication records. As this electronic medical record database grows it will provide an excellent tool to use in assessing client outcomes and doing community-based research on CHC's inner city population. CHC's plan is to move toward a fully paperless chart as electronic linkage to laboratory and hospital information improves.

CHC's commitment to improved and innovative primary care has been strengthened by participation in clinical trials, including HIV and Hepatitis C trials, and the program looks forward to increased participation over the next year.

## **OUTREACH SERVICES**

This past year has once again brought a number of changes for Outreach Services, the biggest one being its move from 469 Swift Street to 1105 North Park Street. This was brought about because 469 Swift Street was seen as the best location for the new Dental Clinic, as it is right next door to the Community Health Centre. After much negotiation, paint and minor renovations, Outreach Services moved to its new site on March 26<sup>th</sup>. The move puts Outreach once again on the "highway" between downtown services: in September the Open Door will move to 935 Pandora (next to the Upper Room) from its current Pembroke Street location, and in October Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Society (DARS) will be moving Detox and their supportive recovery services to the old juvenile detention center, a block and a half away from Outreach Services on Cook Street.

Outreach Services continued a varied program last year, including providing support to Mental Health/Forensic clients, Alcohol and Drug clients, Seniors Outreach clients and drop-ins. Outreach Services also oversaw the management of the Garden Gate Residence last year, although that program has recently been closed.

Two Alcohol & Drug Services' counselors (along with two new relief counselors) averaged 50-60 clients on each of their caseloads last year. In Supportive Recovery, a third Private Accommodation Home was added, and the program also provided assessment, counselling and case management services to Ashgrove House. A paper on Dual Diagnoses that was prepared by one of Outreach's counselors was well received by funders and the community, and served as the basis for a successful proposal for a Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) grant to develop a street based lifeskills program for persons with concurrent disorders in the downtown area. The SCPI-funded contractor came to Outreach Services with a huge skill base in psychiatry, teaching and health issues, and the program looks forward to the outcome of her project in March 2003.

Seniors Outreach continued with one full-time and one weekend case manager. This team carried over 20 clients on a regular basis, providing full case management and support services. Outreach Services anticipates continuing Seniors Outreach services next year, when the new Fairway Woods program opens.

Lastly, Outreach Services is very excited about its increasing participation in the ICMHIS project. The program will trial a specifically-designed custom database in conjunction with Streetlink and Sandy Merriman House. The database is anticipated to provide useful outcome measures for our services, which will increasingly meet the needs of Outreach Service's funders and its community.

Outreach Services looks forward to the next year with great hope that it will again provide caring, professional, and cost effective services to its clients.

## **COOL AID EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

Cool Aid Employment Services (CAES) started in January 1993 and has established an excellent reputation in the business community for fast and reliable service. Through job placements and self-esteem developed in our job readiness programming, clients receiving BC Benefits are securing casual, temporary or permanent work every day. CAES is a flexible service, keeping the employer's and the client's needs foremost in its training and placement activities. The

ultimate goal is to help individuals begin a step-by-step approach to overcome their barriers to employment.

CAES has strong employer partners, who continually help those in need by using the Casual Labour Pool for their hiring. However, CAES is much more than just an employment service. Clients and staff work together to create an atmosphere where people feel safe, secure, supported and respected while being given the opportunity to fulfill their own potential for growth, success and employment.

### **CAES Programs Help People Find Work:**

**Casual Labour Pool** – Not only is this a great service for employers, it also helps clients feel like they are doing something positive and are contributing to their community. This is the only “No Fee” labour pool in Victoria. Common requests are for help in construction, landscaping, moving, cleaning or painting. CLP’s ongoing focus is to provide more secretarial, hospitality and retail trained help.

**Skills To Work Program** – is an intense, fun-filled 7-week program that provides clients an opportunity to explore their work history, update their resumes, define their goals and get back to work. Skills To Work is a combination of in-class training, group exploration workshops, one-on-one counselling and casual labour placements.

**Retail Training Program** – The program is a unique partnership between Cool Aid, Cadillac Fairview and Camosun College. Participants learn how to work in the retail industry, give great customer service and network with potential employers. Retail owners benefit from 8-week placements that give them a chance to try a person out before hiring them.

**Workplace Based Training Program** – is designed to get individuals back to work quickly and effectively. The key is a training incentive for an employer that allows them to give new employees the training they need to be effective on the job. It also will pay for training of existing employees and upgrading courses as required to a maximum of \$3,000.

**Peer Connector Services** - This community solution supports a peer-to-peer mentoring approach in helping homeless and street-involved individuals who are least prepared to re-enter the work force. A professional counselor trained 8 peer connectors who will work with 10 or more chronically homeless individuals. The project works closely with agencies, organizations and facilities already present in our community.

**Other services available** - Access to a computer/internet; Phone use for job-related calls; Referrals to other community services and employment agencies; Self-resume production; Fax service for local job-related faxes.

### **DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTRE**

In the fall of 1997 the Downtown Community Activity Centre (DCAC) was established as a unique community resource for those living, working and involved in Victoria’s Downtown – with a special emphasis on those who do not traditionally access recreational or social facilities. This was a result of a community scan that indicated that many sectors of the Downtown community felt that the Centre would fulfil an important role in our community. However, these

responses were also indicative of a major challenge – responding to a multiplicity of needs and desires.

Since its inception, DCAC has grown from a centre of one staff member, two programs and a handful of users, to five staff, a university co-op student, countless community volunteers and approximately 31,000 annual users. Part of the Centre's great success is due to the partnerships it has established over the years with the Victoria Cool Aid Society, the City of Victoria's Community Service Department, and the Vancouver Island Health Authority's Mental Health Services.

Healthy living is facilitated through community involvement and activity for those living, working, and involved in Victoria's downtown. The Centre strives to make recreational opportunities accessible and affordable because it is believed that everyone should have the opportunity for recreational services and social development. Individuals interested in participating in programs who would usually find themselves confronted with the financial barrier have the opportunity to participate through DCAC programming.

What makes DCAC unique is it responds to the social and recreational needs of the downtown community – the program works with the community to develop, provide and support the programs that the community wants, rather than developing programs based on what it thinks the community wants. These community initiatives have allowed the DCAC to offer such diverse programming as Pandora Patio Café, Artistic Tuesdays, African Dancing & Sing Song, Kinder Gym for Day Cares, Drop-in Sports, ALPHA (Active Living Promotes Healthy Attitudes) Fitness, Yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Running Clinic, Weight training, various music classes & Workshops, Dance Classes, Voicemail Services, computer access, and many other programs.

DCAC strives to ensure an environment that is caring and respectful of diversity, and approaches all community members with acceptance, respect and awareness. DCAC believes that everyone has a right to a fit and healthy lifestyle, and through effective community development if provides the programs and services that the community needs.

## **COOL AID DAYCARE**

The Daycare was established in 1973 and is one of Cool Aid's oldest programs. The program is located in a home owned by Cool Aid in Fernwood, and is licensed under the *Community Care Facility Act* and the *Child Care Licensing Regulations*. Three early childhood educators, one special needs educator and six relief staff have cared for approximately 15 children monthly, and the program has been proud to offer services to families with a wide range of backgrounds, incomes, employment situations and educations.

The Daycare program has long had difficulties in terms of its financial sustainability, in part because it is a for-fee program and is not government funded, unlike all other Cool Aid programs. This is one of the many ways in which Daycare differs from the main focus of Cool Aid, a situation that led to its review and reconsideration as part of Cool Aid's ongoing restructuring.

Over the next year, the Daycare program will close, as Cool Aid moves to consolidate its programs and services around its refocused mandate: shelter, housing and health services for the disadvantaged downtown community. Cool Aid is very grateful for the long-term dedication of program management and staff, and acknowledges the hard work that has gone into the program for the past thirty years.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

The financial results for 2001/2002 show a significant growth in the Society's operations, from \$5.1 million in 2001 to \$7.4 million in 2002 with a corresponding growth in its net assets. Total assets under management of the Society are now more than \$16 million.

The Society's operating results show a surplus of \$53,767, which compares favourably to the previous year's shortfall of \$17,946. The Society has been able to achieve these results partially through a one-time gain of \$110,000 from the sale of shares held by the Society and by accessing surpluses generated by the Community Health Centre.

Notwithstanding these positive results for 2001/2002, the Society is anticipating significant financial challenges for the next fiscal year. The Society's Board of Directors and staff are in the process of developing an action plan to meet these challenges in order to ensure the continuation of the core services provided by the Victoria Cool Aid Society.

*Thea Vakil*  
*Treasurer*  
*Board of Directors*

*September 2002*